



ROUNDUP

Pumping Ten Watts To The World

KUUMBA Educates Campus

Who was the first African-American woman to serve in Congress? Those who read their electronic mail in February learned that it was former Rep. Shirley Chisholm, a Democrat from Brooklyn, N.Y., who served for 14 years. Then, in another first, Chisholm actively ran for the presidential nomination before returning to academe.

Kuumba, the Pan African Student Union of Drew University, celebrated Black History Month by sharing such information. Throughout February "Kuumba's Fact of the Day" greeted the campus community on e-mail each morning. Facts gleaned from *American Legacy* magazine ranged from accomplishments in the arts to politics and sports.

Few radio-listeners of the 1950s and '60s could forget the plaintive child's voice saying, "More Parks sausages, Mom, please." That commercial was made by the first black-owned company to be publicly owned and traded, the Parks Sausage Company begun by Henry G. Parks Jr.

More recently, Hazel Johnson became the first African-American woman general. The Army promoted the Ph.D.-holding soldier to brigadier general in 1979, and she served as chief of the Army Nursing Corps until retiring in 1983.

More than 200 years earlier, slave Phillis Wheatley, who had been educated and encouraged by the Wheatley family, published a book of poetry, the first published book by an African-American. She even wrote a congratulatory poem to George Washington and was invited to his headquarters.

DESPITE NATIONAL RECOGNITION AS ONE OF COLLEGE RADIO'S TOP-10 STATIONS, WMNJ IS FIGHTING TO IMPROVE ITS REPUTATION ON CAMPUS.

It is WMNJ, 88.9 FM, "The Voice of Drew University." And in a recent Knight-Ridder newspaper poll of Hot College Radio Stations, it placed seventh in its class in the nation, beating out area mainstay 89.5 WSOU, Seton Hall Pirate Radio.

They did just that in 1983 and changed the call letters to WMNJ. Around that time, however, the station missed the boat on a chance to upgrade its wattage. All college stations were being asked to upgrade at that time and, for reasons not in the records, WMNJ simply didn't.

The station has been around for at least 20 years, pumping its 10 watts of power into campus buildings without cinder block walls and through the towns of Madison, Chatham, and Florham Park when the weather is nice. The exact date of its birth, according to senior General Manager John Dennehey, is sketchy (as are most details of the station's history), but the records that do exist date back to the mid-1970s. The station has broadcast from the Pit below the Pit in Tolley Hall since its inception.

"Stork," an employee of WFMU in East Orange, was a faithful DJ and devotee of the station in its early days. He came on board in 1976 and worked at the station until he left Drew in 1978. In the 1980s the station was a much larger presence on campus than it is today, which brings us to Dennehey's goal. He hopes to talk with alumni of WMNJ and "bring the station back to its old form." While a common belief around campus is that no one tunes in anymore, Dennehey maintains, "a lot more people than you think" do listen. After all, the station did make Knight-Ridder's top 10.

"We sort of programmed music for eating," Stork says, "seeing as 90 percent of our audience was captive—trapped in the Commons. I think we made the food taste good by comparison with our broadcasting."

In those days it was known as WERD (spell it backwards). Stork recalls such radio personas as "Bob Dark," whose DJ-quality voice and self-invented nonsense language made him one of the more popular DJs at the time. WERD was a carrier-current AM station, the norm for college stations back then, which means it broadcast over a limited area. In fact, WERD was wired only into buildings on campus.

Consequently the station was not subject to FCC regulations and pretty much anything went over the air. When the signal started leaking off campus and into Madison, however, residents began complaining of the liberal use of obscenities. WERD's managers decided it was time to look into going FM.

Dennehey speculates that the managers may not have been able to upgrade because the frequencies of WMNJ and its neighboring stations overlap just enough to keep it within its boundaries. For a radio station so close to New York City, this is a common problem.

But for a school that has no real communications program, Dennehey says, "Ten watts is still pretty good."

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But in recent years a problem has plagued WMNJ—vandalism. Two years ago someone jammed a fork into one of the speakers, resulting in \$200 worth of damage. Last year the situation came to a head when the station was forced to close early after two freshman DJs spilled beer in the sound board, the nerve center of the WMNJ operation.

Incidents like these contribute to what Dennehey calls "the downward spiral effect. Everyone used to respect the station when it was a bigger presence on campus," he explains. "But as the station's reputation has diminished, DJs have become less concerned with



General Manager Dennehey at the sound board

WMNJ property and some have become destructive." And as such incidents continue to occur, the reputation of WMNJ continues to decline.

The new sound board cost the station roughly \$5,000 but it was money well-spent, according to Dennehey. Not

only did the university agree to foot half the bill but the new equipment has also given station supporters a new attitude. Dennehey says that executive board members will soon begin dropping by for random spot-checks to keep the operation in top working order.

Business Leader Joins Trustees

In February the trustees welcomed new at-large board member Stanley C. Gale, a New Vernon resident. The graduate from Rollins College, Winter Park, Fla., also earned an M.B.A. there at the Roy E. Crummer School of Business and Finance.

Gale is a principal of Gale & Wentworth, Inc., a diversified real estate services and investment firm in Florham Park. The founding partner of the 11-year-old company directs the investment, management, and marketing operations of its 14.2 million square foot property portfolio.

Listed in *Business News* as one of New Jersey's top 100 business people in 1996, Gale is a recognized industry leader. He

At the same time Dennehey is encouraging students to tune into 88.9 and ask for it to be played in public places like the Commons and the University Center. He's also advertising the station by putting flyers in local businesses and schools. Another audience-building idea, broadcasting sporting events, was ultimately scrapped when the sports teams protested that it would keep spectators from actually coming out and watching the games.

Undaunted, the station's supporters are now toying with an on-campus dance party that could be broadcast live to the rest of campus. And a 20-year anniversary party at The Other End is also in the planning stages.

"But the executive board can only do so much," Dennehey points out. "It also falls to the DJs and the student body to support the station." A little advice from DJs of old wouldn't hurt either.

Oh, and for those of you wondering, WMNJ is not just a set of random call letters. The W is generic for all radio stations, the M stands for Madison, and the NJ is ... well, you figure it out.—E.R.S.

and received the Garden State Ballet's Arts Award in 1990.

The board also extended emeritus status to at-large trustees Philip H. Haselton of Haselton Associates; Donald E. Procknow; The Rev. Dr. Robert D. Simpson C'45, T'48, T'54; and Ross E. Traphagen Jr.—S.N.G.